

[A].

00:00

Interviewer: My name is Alicia Mittelman and I'm a curator at the Estes Park Museum. Today is January 7, 2014 and we are at the Shinn-Sievers home. This is an interview with Greg Sievers for the Estes Valley Mountaineering Oral History Project, a joint venture between the Estes Valley Library and the Estes Park Museum. [This interview is also available in video format, filmed by Brian Brown. The interview was transcribed by Tom Williams with assistance from Alicia Mittelman.]

Today we are going to speak to Greg Sievers about his nearly three decades of climbing in the area and the tremendous amount of work he did advocating for access and protection of climbing areas in Estes Park and in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Greg Sievers: My first time in Estes, even though I went to University of Colorado in Colorado Springs, I had never heard of Estes, I was here during the flood. I lived in Alaska for six years through several recessions and looking for work in Alaska, I'd finally just given up. I'd had three jobs in four years up there. Came down to my parent's house in Colorado Springs, the great refuge of all kids is I crashed at the folk's house and tried to figure out your next step in life. So I was riffling the Denver Post looking for jobs and I saw a job that said, "Engineering Technician, Town of Estes Park." I knew the name, I knew it was in Northern Colorado and sent them a resume and a cover letter and bugged them with a couple of phone calls. Got an interview and because I had an old truck at the time, my dad said, "Hey, I was in Estes Park in 1945 and I stayed at the Elkhorn Lodge." He said, "Can I drive up with you?" I said, "That would be great." So my dad drove me up here and it would have been about the first of November, perhaps mid-October of 1987. I will never forget cresting Park Hill and seeing Lumpy Ridge and just thinking, "I will have this job, I will live here. I have to." The high peaks and Lumpy was just magic. I have never forgot that. Moon rises and sun sets and the thousands of times I've come through that pass, it's always been awesome to come back to Estes. So applied for the job and got the job. That was sort of the start of my rock climbing. There wasn't much for introductory rock climbing in Alaska. The Chugach Range is fractured shale and not conducive to quality climbing. That's how I got started in the Estes Park area and got established and had myself a little forty hour a week job and a steady income.

Interviewer: Did you know anybody in Estes Park?

Greg Sievers: No, didn't know a soul. In fact, I started my first day of work was November 30, 1987 and I found a little cottage house to live in up on hill streets near the hospital. I was living there mid-December and one of these big nasty winter fronts came through like we had yesterday. I was in the living room, I don't know if I was reading or watching TV and I had a fire going. The fireplace had glass doors

and it blew so hard it came down the chimney and it blew the fireplace doors open and it blew flames and sparks out across the carpet. I went into work the next day thinking, "What have I done? This place is horrible. What have I done to myself to move to this hell hole, it's so windy that it blew open your fireplace?" Like everybody here in Estes Park, you learn to just roll with the bad weather.

Interviewer: That's quite a comparison to Alaska.

Greg Sievers: Actually to me, other than the wind, it was one of the nice comparisons to Alaska. One of the things I told a lot of people, a lot of locals and the folks that I worked with at Town Hall were always fascinated, or intrigued I should say, as to "Why did you want to come here? What about this weather?" They were thinking this Estes Park area had bad weather, bad winters. I said, "It's kind of the same, what Alaska had in latitude, Estes Park has in altitude." So really they were very similar. Temperature was similar, snow conditions, at least at that time, were similar. That first winter I moved here they all thought I was crazy. I'd ride my bike to work and there was six or eight inches of new snow on the ground. I didn't care, I just thought I'd moved to heaven. Anchorage was sort of a big city and you couldn't really commute to work on a bicycle but I sure thought I could here, it was only a mile.

05:13

Interviewer: After you learned the ropes in your job as an engineer for the town, when did you begin climbing and what were some of the first routes that you did?

Greg Sievers: I think some of my very first investigations, the very first thing I did was march across Elkhorn Avenue and walk into the Estes Park Mountain Shop, that was run by Todd Jirsa and Rob Mardock, and introduced myself. The only climbing guide book that was available at the time was the little white High Peaks book by Dick Dumais. It sort of became my bible; it's like the where and the what. I wasn't much of a rock climber at the time. I'd done some 5.6, 5.7, 5.8 routes in Alaska, but just a small handful. I really would not at all consider myself a rock climber at that time. I'd cut my teeth in Alaska on ice. So the very first thing I sought out in Rocky Mountain National Park were ice routes. All the same standards that apply today. Unlike rock routes that as your abilities get better, you can expand into more difficult routes and do more route pioneering. Solid ice, just pure ice routes are rather static. They are ephemeral, they are either there or they are not by the amount of moisture and cold weather. It has mostly been this last ten to fifteen years that the mixed climbing has really taken off. But at that time when I got here I just sought out Jaws, Hidden Falls. But I moved to this town, already being a grade 5 ice climber and found the ice gradings here a full number grade easier than they were in Alaska. I have adapted to that, probably gotten softer, but at that time being 30 years old and full of myself, I found that all of the ice routes here to be extremely easy. Everything that was graded Water Ice 4, I thought was a WI3. Everything that was graded Water Ice 5, I thought was a WI4. Cause I was just so used to Alaska standards of big long and just more sustained and difficult. So I was a bit cocky.

Interviewer: Did you find that the ice climbing here was pretty thoroughly pioneered and written about or was there so a lot yet to climb?

Greg Sievers: Well, like I said a moment ago, based on the standards at the time, as a pure ice climber, I thought most things were already identified, previously climbed and routed and catalogued. But as those standards in the late '80s, through the '80s as mixed climbing was being pushed and pioneered by people like Jeff Lowe and Duncan Ferguson in the '70s and '80s. As those mixed standards and the style of climbing became more mixed, of putting your sharp tools on rock, it just opened the door in Estes Park and the Rocky Mountain National Park area. It just opened the door to an endless list that continues to grow today. Such as Topher [Donahue] and Kevin Cooper's brand new line next to the Window up on Longs Peak. You get a big moist fall which we've all been praying for decades and new lines show up. I did a handful of that in Rocky over last ten years. What we call, "Taking your tools for a walk." Because a lot of times you get skunked, you just make a big hike with a 40 pound pack and you don't find what you're looking for. Or you scratch your way up something small and insignificant and silly just so you can make some sparks that day.

09:47

Interviewer: What's it like as an ice climber and a mixed climber to, at the start of the season, where do you begin, where do you go, where do you find your favorite routes?

Greg Sievers: The difficulty of climbing ice, early season here, is twofold. One is the elevation, naturally the higher up the colder it is, so a lot of the routes will form up at 12 – 13,000 feet in late September and early October for sure. In the first two weeks of October. They'll later sublimate later in November or first of December, they'll be gone. Those high altitude routes are not only four to six mile approach and at high elevation, but they're really hard. There are very few high altitude routes that are like Water Ice 3 or something that you can warm up on. Or as my buddy Steve and I always say about our first couple days out there, "Shaking out the cobwebs, how's it feel up there?" "Just shaking out the cobwebs." Case in point, 2001 Kelly Cordes and Topher went up on the Lower East Face of Longs, found some brand new ice. Put up a WI5 thin route called "Crazy Train" an Ozzie Osborn song. Put up Crazy Train and posted it I believe, had a comment on, I think it was Mountain Project or Climbing.com at the time. Just unleashed the masses of everybody who could climb WI5, first day out. So case in point then, five mile approach, probably closer to six. Starting out at probably 12,000' and it's WI5, 5 plus. First day out, that's what's called "Shaking out the cobwebs." You've climbed rock all summer long, your hands feel strong, your forearms feel strong, your heart and your mind are in it. But holy crap, it's 12,000' and it's vertical water ice and it's really thin. You've got to do some tricky traverse maneuvers a third of the way up the pitch.

Interviewer: What can you do to train for that? We have climbing gyms for rock climbing, so what can you do for early season ice climbing?

Greg Sievers: That overlaps. Well, didn't exist then and it does now, is the cross fit type thing. Unlike a lot of climbers I have a very diverse interest. I am equally entertained and in love with the back country. When I just bag fourteeners with my wife, at some point in our life we realized that people come from all over the world, all over the country to Colorado to climb fourteeners. We live here and we'd only done a few each, before we ever met. We thought, we had these great dogs, and we thought, "We should do that, we should just tick off a few each summer, it's something to do together. It's something to stay in shape." A lot of the fourteeners are ten mile round trips. Some of them we've taken alternate routes and made fourteen and sixteen mile days out of it. It's all just pieces of training that keeps your legs and your lungs strong. I cycle to cross train. I've had three spinal surgeries. Even though I can run, I chose not to, I don't think it's probably a really smart idea to jam on my bones that hard. So I cycle to cross train. So I hike in the summer, I rock climb in the summer, I'm an avid hunter. I don't have any problem either carrying heavy loads of elk meat or putting in lots of miles bird hunting, pheasant hunting. Anything that keeps you active. Yeah, I go to the indoor gym or pull a little plastic on rare occasions and lift weights to cross train.

14:19

Interviewer: With all of that kind of preparation, let's talk about a little bit about some of your favorite first assents. How did you go about choosing the ones you did in Estes Park and which ones stick out in your mind?

Greg Sievers: Mixed routes are probably my favorite first assents. There's some small, very small handful of rock routes which are generally all alpine routes. I don't think I've ever catalogued some of them. I've never written them down and I've not really gotten into the Mountain Project display and cataloguing and identification. There's still routes I've never really spoke about, they were just days out. Especially in the late '80s when I first got here we'd go to an alpine area and realize that the route that we had chosen was over our head or neither one of us felt good about leading the crux pitch so we might bail off of that. And then "While we're here, let's just do this or while we are here, that looks like that will go." I think there's a fair amount of that in everybody's resume. Things that stand out in my mind are some of the routes that I've gone to do like Vanquished, it's a big ice route with a five or six mile approach up past Sky Pond. Probably a mile beyond Sky Pond at the back of the Powell Cirque. Got there and there wasn't any condition, it had no ice and rather than just claw at the rock, there was some ice adjacent to it. Brian Verholst and I just got to scratching out way up. Didn't really have new routing in mind; just saw some bits and pieces of ice. Saw a couple of ice shelves and a couple smears and columns that we laced together and ended up doing, I think it's a, I'm trying to think of the end of it. That's another problem, I've never really, even though I did write that one down and I even sketched it up in a graphic. I did share it, it's been repeated a number of times, it's M5, WI5. I guess here sitting on the spot I can't even remember the name of it.

Interviewer: Well you actually have a number of first assents with Brian. He's been your partner for a great deal of adventure out there.

Greg Sievers: I met Brian in about 2003 or 2004 I want to say. He was working for the Parks Department at the Town of Estes Park. I'm not sure how the conversation came up, he was a seasonal employee, how the conversation came up about climbing. I'm real picky about climbing partners. I'm not an easy person to wrangle into tying in with. I've spent so much time in the back country tied to a rope that I feel, it's not just the brotherhood of the rope, it's putting my life on the line and knowing that whether I'm belaying somebody or someone is belaying me, that my life is in their hands that mistakes can't happen. I've never been involved personally in an accident, I've been involved with one accident at Lumpy but I've never taken a big leader fall. I've never been injured and I've never been in a critical injury situation. A lot of that is because I've been real picky about who I climb with. As I talked with Brian who was only maybe 23 or 25 years old at the time, he was very thoughtful, very thorough. Knew a lot about first aid and was very thorough in his mental processes of being safe and climbing safe. But pushing hard and climbing hard and so we started tying in and going to Lumpy that summer. We were both climbing pretty solid 5.10 and spent several summers climbing 5.10. Then through that found out that he enjoyed ice and mixed also. We've traveled together and climbed together in the Rockies.

19:20

Interviewer: Maybe you can describe to me a little more what makes a good climbing partner.

Greg Sievers: A really sick sense of humor. If you're warped, stupid and act like Bevis and Butt-head, I'll like you just fine. I have probably equally been appreciated for my humor and not appreciated for my humor. I think keeping that level of levity and humor has gotten me through a lot of difficult situations. My friends and my climbing partners have found that if I get quiet, you'd better not talk to me. If I'm on lead and I get really quiet I have been known to bark pretty hard at my friends, at my belayer like, "Shut up, don't talk to me." The other 99% of the time I'm usually cracking off beauties. So if I'm on lead and I'm telling jokes and telling stories, everything is going good. I can do that climbing up the very peak of my ability unless I get scared. I think that's probably one of the things that makes a good climbing partner, just a small cross section of your personality that jives with the other person. Man or woman that humor and I mean to spend with people, it's probably like any friendship. Approximately similar political views or financial views or religious views, so that you don't grate on one another. On any given day, a day outing, probably not a big deal what so ever. To do multi days or exhibition climbing, it probably means a lot in my opinion.

Interviewer: Can you think of any times where you might have been in kind of a harry situation and humor really helped?

Greg Sievers: Yeah, quite a few, not ones that I can easily bring to mind. I've done eight climbing trips into the Alaska Range and all of which would push my abilities. I've been dead ended many times in the Alaska Range and had to swallow that sour pill of fixing a point to begin rappelling. That you've thrown in the towel, the route won't go through, it's too difficult or more unlikely it's just too dangerous.

I've had a number of those, just had pushed to the point where the danger level was too high. I've done a lot of that in Rocky also. I think that's why I'm still here and I'm not busted up. Because I was willing to push and push hard but not push into the level of stupidity and make mistakes or to a point where

22:43 [End of Part A.]

[B].

00:00

the ice would fall off or the rock would break or the difficulty was so far beyond my abilities that I'd get hurt trying. I've never been a 5.12 climber but I didn't get hurt either.

Interviewer: But in those expeditions comes a whole bag of conditions to keep in mind. As I recall you were once stuck in the back country. You were in a snow cave with some friends.

Greg Sievers: I guess I had two serious situations. One was on Denali in the spring of 1987 actually, right before I moved to Estes Park. We had elected to not go down off the mountain in the face of a massive Alaska storm, when everybody else on the upper mountain, Mt. McKinley, Denali had bailed and the Park Service had radioed and recommended to all teams to come down. It was between wind and temperature was going to be extreme. I think John Krakauer highlighted that best when he interviewed my team that year. We dug around moled our way into the snow and ice and found an old cave that Brian Okonek's crew had dug a number of years before at about 17,000'. Opened up the hole of the cave and burrowed in and augured it out and made room for. There was two teams that we spent ten days in an ice cave at 17,000'. I was all of 29 years old. I was brand new to climbing, I'd only been climbing for four years at that point. Yeah we toughed it out. It was pretty difficult; we ran out of food in three days and spent seven days nibbling on rice. We dug some food out of the, literally out of the wall of the cave. Old stuff, there was one can of kipper snacks.

Interviewer: There was a cache of food there?

Greg Sievers: At one time you could call it a cache, it was just bits and pieces that had been left behind. Like I said, one can of kipper snacks is all we had for four of us to eat one day. We stuck it out. Unfortunately for me, even at that young age I had already done some spinal damage from motor cycle accidents. I elected to not climb the upper mountain and when the weather broke it poised our team at a point where the other three guys went for the summit and summited. But I had pulled the plug at that point. In fact just a couple of days later I actually contemplated getting choppered off the mountain because my back hurt so bad but managed to walk out on my own power. So that was one, that was one of an early on kind of a position to press your mental and physical abilities to the very brink. The other was on the Diamond here in early September 1989 or '90, I don't really recall. We were doing the Casual Route, John Marrs and I. John still lives in the Boulder-

Rollinsville area I believe. He had mentored me in rock climbing here. He had been quite a power house in the late '70s early '80s and had taken some time off and he and I struck up quite the brotherhood for a number of years. He kind of set me on a course of routes, of high alpine routes through Rocky of all the high alpine classics. Help me bring my rock skills from like the 5.8 to the 5.10 level. We were having an enjoyable climb of the Casual Route that summer and got stuck behind a rope team that was very slow and over their head. John didn't see the need to push past them. He was trying to not be too French about it and literally climb over and through them. So we held up and then there was another rope team behind us. So we held and we held and we were held up hours, two or three hours behind this other rope team that was just way over their head. And the weather changed, the weather changed for the worse.

04:53

I want to at some point take the time to write this as a story for one of the climbing rags. I was able to see something that I hope I never see again and I wouldn't wish on anybody. But I saw lightning in three dimensions. I saw a tube of white light come down over our back during that storm that was probably no farther than that camera is to me. That I felt like I could reach out and almost put my hand into the white fire of lightening. It was a cylindrical tube with wisps coming off of it. I welled up, I was like, I feel it right now, it felt like my life was moments from being taken and scared the shit out of me. It's tough to talk about it because I don't think most people ever, ever see that and ever would know what that's like. We were at 14,000' feet and had to just, we couldn't go down, there was a rope team behind us. It started snowing, all the ledges iced up. The grapple stacked up to like 2" to 4" thick on the ledges. We were truly hosed, we were in serious, serious, we didn't have gloves. We had fuzzy hats but it was just late summer. I don't really recall whether it was the last week of August or first week of September. But we were in serious shit. The kids above us had just barely made it to Table Ledge and got off. I was furious, I was absolutely furious. We were stuck on the wall, we ended up going to direct aid on the crux pitch in an attempt to continue upward because it was only 100' to Table Ledge but it was 1,000' to go down. So it seemed like the thing to do was to move up and the rope team behind us, who became my very close dear friends, and Steve Britt became a fellow that I spent the next, I still climb with him to this day. We've been buddies for 20 years. To get off of the rock was, we ended up leaving gear behind. We did everything we could to not fall, to stay alive. Everything was iced up. The lightening was still rumbling through the cirque, still bouncing, it was cloud to ground lightening all around Longs and Meeker and Lady Washington. I saw these kids going down the North Face and I lost my composure and I just screamed obscenities at them across the cirque. In a sense it wasn't their fault, in hindsight I would probably have just literally found a way to climb over them or through them and leave them behind. Protect our own hide or teamed up with them in some manner to move ahead and get off. It was probably the only time in my entire 30 year climbing career that I thought I die. Those are the two big

moments that stand out, those that sculpt your core, that change your ability to know your limits and to push past them.

Interviewer: Wow.

Greg Sievers: I don't think I've ever told anybody that story.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing it with me. How then after that moment, how did you stay committed to climbing?

Greg Sievers: That kind of actually peaked my desire. That was a formative point for my heart and soul and mind that, "If I can get through that I can get through anything." Rod Willard and I used to talk about our bag of tricks. An "all-a-rounder" is a term you'll hear through the climbing community. An "all-a-rounder" means you climb ice, you climb rock, you climb mountains, you do some bouldering, you know aid. At one point in my career I prided myself that I could literally climb down anything I could climb up, whether it was reversing 5.10 or 5.11 moves or reversing moves in an offwidth or down climbing WI5. I prided myself to know that I could reverse moves and that was what Rod and I always referred to as "our bag of tricks" that you have enough experience in so many different facets that there's always an opportunity or an option to do it differently. You can traverse to a different route or a different location, or that you can reverse the moves. You can unstick yourself, you never find yourself stuck cause there's always an alternative option to take to undo the damage that you've gotten yourself into. To me that's an all-a-rounder. It kind of builds in those pieces of when I was a Boy Scout, the skills for first aid and compass and map work and all those things that you learn as a youngster. All of my skills in the field as a hunter of tracking and stalking. I have always hunted on foot, I've never owned an ATV or any of that stuff. I don't mind doing miles and long days from dark to dark hunting elk or deer or something. It's the same as in my climbing and that's a different bag of tricks, those are different woods and back country skills. What water you're drinking, you're purifying. The ability to build a fire and all that kind of stuff that originates when you are a little kid, it might be Boy Scouts. All of those bits and pieces that create my life style that back woods, those skills, survival skills. I've always in the back of my mind knew that, as I told my girlfriend who later became my wife, "Don't ever call rescue on me. I can always get myself out even if I'm broken. I'll always get out of what I've got into." I guess there's been a couple of other back country Rocky Mountain National Park scenarios that, a 23 hour day on the East Face of McHenry's to push a summer route into a winter route with Dougald MacDonald. Our wives weren't happy, they were as his wife called my wife at 3:00am wanting to know if she'd heard. Jennifer [Sievers] attempted to have Christine [MacDonald] settle down. "You've got to give the boys time, let them get out of what they got into. If they have to do an open bivy and do the homo-huddle, you do what you gotta do." You spoon, you do whatever you needed to do to stay alive through the storm. That's what us climbers call, "building character."



Interviewer: Big responsibility. You mentioned Rod Willard. Could we talk about him briefly and how you built something in his honor?

Greg Sievers: I'd love to, I love talking about Rod. Talk about something here just a couple of years ago and then I'll reflect back. Over on Stanley Avenue up behind the Holiday Inn there's a little garage, a little two car garage that's an indoor climbing gym. Four years ago, almost to the week, I had a metal hip resurfacing done just from more wearing out my body. I was rehabbing that metal hip and after six or eight weeks decided it was time to maybe do a little bouldering. Didn't really want to go down to the Mountain Shop, wanted something a little bit more quiet in case I didn't do well, in case the pain overwhelmed me or something, I didn't know. I thought, "Oh, I'll go over to "Rod's Gym" is what it's called. So I went over to Rod's Gym and I had gotten the combination to the door and I was there by myself. A few other people showed up and somebody was visiting and the one person says to the other, "Why do they call it Rod's Gym?" The other person says, "I don't know, some guy that used to live here." That didn't sit well, it didn't sit well at all. So I commenced to explain to these folks exactly who Rod was, Rod Willard and how that gym came to be. At that moment I decided that, "That can't just be the case." The Bicknells owned the property at the time, he's the owner of Colorado Mountain School. So I talked with John and I say, "Hey would you mind if I made a little photo and write up about Rod Willard and stuck it on the wall of the gym?" He said, "Naw, that would be great." So I'll take this opportunity to segway back to the mid '90s when I first met Rod. I was trying to put together, I'm trying to find a climbing partner with all those skills and that bag of tricks that I referenced, to go into the Alaska Range and do a new route on Mt. Huntington. Rod at the same time was looking for a partner to go to Mt. Hunter to do a new route. He had his partner lined up, I was still seeking one. Rod had to bail out because he got a job opportunity. I went on to attempt to pioneer a new route on Mt. Huntington but Rod and I had struck up a friendship that year, or improved our friendship I should say. We were already close acquaintances in the Estes area. As we built our friendship, he calls me up one day and he says, "Do you know how to do layout?" Meaning framing, "Yeah," I had just built a house a few years earlier. And he goes, "What's layout?" He wanted to build this garage but he didn't know what layout was, he'd actually poured the slab for the foundation but he didn't know how to build. So I went over to visit after work one day and I just had the biggest kick out of that, because I thought, "You've taken on a project that you don't know the basics of how to build. Oh, I'll help you out, we're friends, I'll help you out." So I went several nights after work. This is starting from scratch, all there is is a slab. And I looked around the slab and I say, "So where are your J-bolts?" He's like, "What's that?" I said, "Well you were supposed to cast bolts into the foundation so you can bolt your sill plate. So you're bolting your structure to your concrete slab." He didn't have those, we ended up having to borrow a hammer drill from Scott Kimball and started from scratch. So that summer Rod and I built the gym, built a two car garage so that it would be a marketable item when there wasn't a bunch of plastic holds on the inside. Above those two bay windows there's actually a full size header so you can put a garage door in. That building could be gutted of its climbing debris and

turned into a garage if somebody ever needed to. Those bay windows came from a local builder who had demoed them out of a house. Rod footed the bill for the materials, I helped out, his girlfriend cooked dinner most nights and we'd hammer nails every day after work and made a little gym. Then to tie that garage story forward then, we jokingly five years later or so, 2000 or 2001, early 2001 he calls me up and says, "You got a minute?" "Yeah." "Ok, I'm coming right over." "What?" "I'm coming over, I'm coming over." So he comes over, he's all excited, he's just all jacked up. He comes over, he goes, "I'm going to ask her to marry me." I say, "No, dude you can't do that. We're the eternal bachelors." We were probably about 40 years old at the time. I was like, "No way, there's no way you can do that." He goes, "Yeah, she's not like any other woman I've ever met. I'm going to ask her to marry me." "If you can do it, maybe I should ask Jennifer to marry me." So we had another beer and we're throwing darts and we're joking around, and I say, "Maybe we'll have a double wedding." "Naugh, that would be too big a crowd." So Rod got married to Kerry in I think it was about September 24, 2001 and I married Jennifer about two weeks later, October 6, 2001. Unfortunately that was for both of us; it was also in the shadow of September 11<sup>th</sup> that year. So that was kind of a blue part of that period of Americana. But the two eternal bachelors had fallen to love that fall. Unfortunately for all horrible circumstances, Rod was killed in an ice climbing accident in Vail, not but three months later. So I've stayed in touch with Kerry off and on since then. She's gone on to remarry and be happy, but it was a pretty rough time when one of your best friends is killed. I was just ice craging in Vail. That's another reality of climbing and unfortunately took my good friend Rod. Rod's Gym, so I did complete a nice little memorial and laminated it and stapled it to the wall so that anybody else who goes to that structure at least has a sense of who Rod was. Not "some guy who used to live here."

20:49

Interviewer: I think that is the case today, I think for all of us that use that gym, it's really, it's a gift to the community but it is obvious that it's in honor of Rod. That gym as I mentioned is a gift to all of us, and for somebody who came here and didn't know a soul in Estes Park, you've really give a lot to the community of climbers here. You are wearing your American Alpine Club shirt there and you served for ten years as the American Alpine Club, Central Rockies Section Chair from '97 to 2007. In that time you spearheaded Lumpy Trails Day and a number of other projects. Can you highlight some of the other things you did on behalf of the AAC in Estes Park?

Greg Sievers: Yeah, as I was telling you the other day, getting involved at the administrative level of the American Alpine Club was by chance and by pressure. A good buddy of mine in Alaska, Steve Davis had suggested to me back in about 1985 that I consider becoming a member of the AAC. That's a long story in itself, but I did become a member. Like most members you get your annual journal, look at the pretty pictures, read the cool stories and think about all the hard men and the hard

women that they write about. It was nice to be near that circle of people, but it wasn't

22:43 [End of Part B.]

[C].

00:00

until Steve invited me down to Golden and get me involved and suggested that I become a chairperson in the summer of '97 or spring of '97 that I found myself, you know I had the time, I had the interest, I had the enjoyment of being around famous climbers who the more I was the more I realized they were just climbers. They were only famous because you, me, and everybody read about them in magazines. No one ever starts out with a goal like that. Like myself, I just went climbing a lot. Bits and pieces of needs and then a climbing community had captured my interest. So after a few years of doing some chairmanship work, a fund raiser, an annual banquet, a newsletter, a climber get-together with beers and a silent auction at BRC, Boulder Rock Club, a bunch of little things like that. By about 2000 I was beginning to notice that all the climber access trails to Lumpy Ridge were getting badly eroded and the Park Service wasn't paying them any attention. As I made inquiries to the Park Service about doing trail maintenance they told me that "They are limited in resources both financially and man power and that they have to apply their resources to the areas that are more heavily used such as from Bear Lake to Emerald Lake or from Bear Lake to Sky Pond." Just the main, the big trails, the Longs Peak trail needed work badly, but again they are limited financially and staffing. So I suggested, "If I could put together a group, could the public to do trail maintenance?" "Oh absolutely," they loved that idea and they told me about they have an elderly group of gentlemen, they call themselves the "Road Hogs" or something that help out up on Trail Ridge Road in the spring when they're trying to open up Trail Ridge Road. They do odds and ends of roadside and road maintenance. Then several other user groups for different types of maintenance and repairs. So, "Yes." So I pursued that, talked with some folks, like with the Access Fund, like Sally Moser, somebody who knew how to do grassroots organization. Tapped those people for, "How do you get the word out? How do you facilitate and organize a group?" So learned a few lessons and starting in 2000, 2000 was the first Lumpy Trails Day. When you are a volunteer you get to do anything you want. So I made it fit my schedule, I wanted it to be in the fall, I wanted it to be on a Sunday so that everybody could go climbing on Saturday. I got the word out across the Front Range and through our, I had a section web page at the time linked to the American Alpine Club web site and was able to get the word out and had not a big turnout, I think I had maybe 20, 25 volunteers that year. Another part of that was like where to start? You've got 2 ½ miles of Lump Ridge from the Twin Owls all the way to Sundance. Which trail do you pick out? Well, again, I picked out my favorite. It's like I wanted to work on the Sundance Trail. In fact at the time, Rod Willard and I were down there climbing and the descent trail off of Sundance was in such braided horrible condition that there was no established way down. The surface

there in that ravine was just decomposed granular material and it was just getting tore up. Every time there was a big thunderstorm it would just get worse. Then the climbers would make it worse. There was just the braid of trails and moving, tumbling, shifting, decomposed granite sand. Every time that would move it would tear up what little bit of growth was trying to establish itself. So that was Lumpy Trails Day number one, was to work on the lower section of the Sundance Descent Trail.

05:03

The next year we broke, I had about 60 people show up the second year, so we broke into two teams, one that worked on the intersection where the Black Canyon Trail breaks off and heads up. And then the other team went up high and worked on the, a thousand feet above that. Six, eight hundred feet up and worked on the upper climber descent trail. So it was really specific to what I wanted to do. I wanted that area to not be so eroded. I also had a concern that at some point the Park Service might not be so friendly towards those trails and if we as a climber/user group tore them up too much worse than they already were that the Park Service might do something drastic like close it down or fence off an area and say, "No more access to this area." We've all seen signs that say, "Restoration area." So I was afraid that at the Book, or the Book End, or Batman Rock, or something that they might fence an area off that says, "No access, restoration area." I didn't want that to happen. They were personal concerns of mine that kind of expanded to the climbing community as a group. People like coming and people love coming to Estes Park, whether you're a tourist or a climber, there's a lot of alpine climbing, a lot of real high quality rock climbing on Lumpy. That second and third year the volunteer group expanded to, gosh one year I think we hit almost 80 volunteers. When you take 80 people out there with picks and shovels and then 10 or 12 or 15 Park Service employees that are the trail specialists, who supply the gloves and the safety glasses and the picks and the shovels, the ads and all the hand tools necessary. Eighty people can build a lot of trail in one day. And that's all it was, Lumpy Trails is a one day event. So I through my organizational skills and my local interaction with, out of Town Hall where my office was, I knew business owners and I'd get Chris Hill and later Carla [Mosier DuBois] at Ed's Cantina to donate free breakfast. So free breakfast for 60 people or go over to Poppy's, I don't remember the gentleman who owns the place [Rob Pieper] but very gracious, very supportive, offered a full box lunch, donated a full box lunch for 60 people with cookies and chips and apples, these beautiful deli sandwiches. So it kinda started to snowball, the word got out that "You've at Lumpy Ridge having fun, the weather's always nice, you're fed like a king, you get a free breakfast, free lunch and afternoon there are all these raffles and [whispering] there was beer a couple of times, not on Park Service property. So there was goodies, so there were some folks like Gene and Denise from Loveland who went every year, ten years. A lot of people would bank six and eight years out of ten because they'd go climbing one day and do Lumpy Trails the next. One particular year when I was feeling particularly powerful, the day before I'd gone up and done Field's Chimney which is a M.5, WI5 route on

the lower East Face of Longs. Flipped around and the next morning was up at 5:00am setting up the American Alpine Club tent up at the original Lumpy Ridge trails parking lot. That took a little effort, I full on ran out of gas that day at 3:00 in the afternoon. I just sat down on the trail. There were some other folks there and I just said, "I got nothing left." I had just put in a 15 hour day of climbing the day before at altitude and I was up early this morning and I swung a pick and carried lunches up and that was always another neat thing, I'd load up by expedition pack and I'd take lunch and deliver it to the trail team. That way folks could just eat where they were. I'd go down to Poppy's or someplace, Domino's or whoever was going to donate lunch and then I'd carry it up to the crew and distribute it in the field and that way it was fresh. That particular year it kicked my butt pretty good, I was pretty whipped.

10:05

Another thing that I wanted to point out about advocacy and working with both the Access Fund and the American Alpine Club was that original Lumpy Ridge parking lot that you and I discussed that was at the old caretaker's house up behind the McGregor Ranch and that kind of stuck in everybody's craw, right here. Climbers had been parking there since the mid '60s when Muriel McGregor was still alive and the McGregor family, they were still operating an active ranch. They had mixed feelings about climber access and climber usage. People like Kimball [Scott] and Doug Snively and stuff I'm sure can speak and then Mike Caldwell can probably speak first-hand about the comings and goings of that access. I think Muriel McGregor passed away in about '73. Thereafter, I heard there was a little bit of rift with a couple of the ranch hands but access rather opened up at that point. There was a reasonably unobstructed vehicle access through the ranch to the gravel parking lot at the base of the Twin Owls there. That carried on until the late '90s when there had been a few iterations in there where the Park Service attempted to control access that didn't work well. There was never anything in writing, there was never any documentation or agreements in writing that would curtail that access. The ranch alluded to that there was, that there was an agreement that Park Service, when they agreed on the conservation easement that included the entire 1,200 acres of the ranch. When that conservation easement became sort of a first right of refusal for the National Park to take, there was supposed to be something in writing that agreed to the removal of that parking lot, but there was nothing documented and that became the burr under the saddle of the ranch. In the '80s I heard it came to a head at one point before I moved to town, but then died and kind of went away. Then by the late '90s it had come up again. By about 2000 or 2001 had become a real issue and the ranch was making a substantial move for the Park Service to eliminate public access to the gravel parking lot and the Lumpy Ridge caretaker's house area. My investigation had indicated that, I'm trying to think of the term in a court of law there's a phrase, I'm not coming up with it right now, that if you use a piece of property or you access it, and it's a funny number, it's like 19 years not 20, but uninterrupted, then that would become public access or public use.

13:46

Interviewer: Stay of execution?

Greg Sievers: That's the second step, that was kind of what I aimed to do. I wanted that gravel parking lot to be improved and kept in its location and the ranch produced a document that said that all the traffic made vibrations in the foundations of the old buildings and the number of school children who were going to visit the ranch were going to get hit by climbers driving two and fro. All of which were ridiculous and unsubstantiated. But the point was it is private property, it is the McGregor Ranch and the Park Service felt that they had the obligation to fulfill the original verbal agreement. Those were the discussions that the ranch and the Park Service had and even though they attempted to get that rolling in, and I don't have those dates memorized, but I want to say 2003 maybe. It was, maybe you have it jotted down in your notes the year that they finally closed that lot. It was about three years from the time they first made the push, I organized some meetings at town hall that I brought in the Park Service Superintendent and his senior staff and invited climbers to come up and voice their concerns and I worked with a gentleman named Steve Pomerance in Boulder to look at this through the legal avenue and I hosted by Senator Udall's office in Denver were I brought in the Senior Advocate of the American Alpine Club at the time, Lloyd Atherton and I went to that meeting. Udall wasn't there, his lieutenant or senior secretary, I can't remember the gentleman's name and the Park Service Regional Manager was there and we laid out all the documents that they produced from the McGregor Ranch back in the '70s and '80s. I was still pretty grey, it was nothing concrete but it did boil down to the old adage, "You can't fight city hall." The Park Service was indeed going to move ahead, it wasn't a question of if, it was a question of when. The only consolation that I took out of it was, as you said, a stay of execution at that point, instead of it being 2003 when they build the new parking lot, it was 2006 or 2007. Since then, those were all positions of business; I maintained friendship and a professional interaction with the Park Service. It wasn't just a year after that when I was at an American Alpine Club annual meeting and I saw rest stop bags, I thought to myself the number of users at Lumpy Ridge who were crapping in the woods, putting it under a rock like we all did. If there were 100 people on Lumpy Ridge on any given spring or fall weekend day, it's probably 100 loads a day in the woods. I thought it was time to make alternate options available, so I approached the Park Service after having learned about these rest stop bags, a human waste disposal program. Spoke with Jim Dugan and he had been investigating and thinking about doing something like that. Like I said, even through the discomfort of contradicting the Park Service regarding parking and access, I turned around and I built a bag dispenser and the first couple were made out of solid oak so that they wouldn't weather and walked into Jim Dugan's office, we had a pleasant conversation and he immediately called in several of his associates and they all loved the idea. Worked with a local carpenter and we built one of those out of solid oak and had all these donated rest stop bags, the Rest Stop Company said that "We'd been wanting to work with the Feds at a Federal level, at the National Park Level and if you put this together

we'll donate the first x-number of cases." Which is, I don't know, a 100 or a 1,000 bags, something like that. So it was kind of the perfect storm, it was easy for me to build a couple of those, the Park Service was already thinking of a way to mitigate back country human waste and the Rest Stop Company was looking to expand their user group. Obviously for them a profit standpoint, but they were willing to donate a mass of bags upfront and then sell more at an extremely discounted rate. I guess between the parking lot work and the Lumpy Trails work and the access work, it was things that just fell into place. They were things that I cared about, I didn't really think much about the ripple effect. The same as climbing, I don't think anybody ever goes out there and says, "If I do this they'll put me in a magazine." Well let's just go climbing and some time there later somebody acknowledges it, thinks it's special. My advocacy work was the same, I never had any idea that anybody was paying attention until one day I got a piece of curious response from the Access Fund and the one in front of you for Lumpy Trails Day. The people were taking note, people were identifying them, Alpine Club and the Access Fund were relating to those as sort of a flag ship, "This is what we as climbers want to represent, this is the relationship, the positive relationship that we want to have with our Federal Land Managers, Forest Service, BLM, Park Service, whoever it happens to be." There was another item up in the Cody Ice area where we were installing bolts rather than having dozens and dozens of pieces of webbing wrapped around trees that the Forest Service had to back off of their no fixed hardware ban. So there were things that just kind of fell into place with local interaction and my interest in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Interviewer: Well it's great to see that you were recognized in such a way from the Access Fund and the Sharp End Award from the Access Fund and the AAC. Thank you for fighting the good fight on behalf of all of us climbers and sharing your story today.

Greg Sievers: Sure. Yeah, thanks for your interest and happy to chat with you.

21:54 [End of Part C. End of Interview.]

sievers\_greg\_20140107.doc

**ABSTRACT:** Greg Sievers introduces the reader to the concept of mixed climbing which is the art of climbing routes using both rock and ice climbing skills. Greg became an accomplished ice climber in Alaska prior to moving to Estes Park in 1987. His climbing skills then became more diverse and he became what he calls an "all-a-rounder" which is a climber who has expertise in a diversity of techniques including rock climbing, ice climbing, mountaineering, and bouldering, his "bag of tricks". Greg describes the challenging experiences of being stranded on Denali for ten days during a major storm and also being trapped on the Diamond during a significant electrical storm. Greg describes the importance of the compatibility of climbing partners and mentions accomplished climbers including John Marrs, Steve Britt, Brian Verholst, and Rod Willard. Greg finishes the interview with the description of his highly recognized advocacy work

on behalf of the climbing community through the Access Fund and the American Alpine Club. One highlight of that work was Greg's founding, organization, and implementation of Lumpy Trails Day which did significant improvements to the climbing trail system along Lumpy Ridge over a period of ten years. He also describes the factors and process which ultimately led to the relocation of the Lumpy Ridge Trailhead away from the McGregor Ranch property.

sievers\_greg\_20140107.doc

#### Greg Sievers Interview – Content Index

Access Fund	11, 15
American Alpine Club	10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15
Boulder Rock Club	10
Britt, Steve	7
Caldwell, Mike	12
Casual Route	6
Chugach Range Alaska	1
Cooper, Kevin	3
Cordes, Kelly	3
Crazy Train Route	3
Davis, Steve	10
Denali Mountain	6
Donahue, Topher	3
Dubois, Carla Mosier	12
Dugan, Jim	14
Dumas, Dick	2
Estes Park Mountain Shop	2
Ferguson, Duncan	3
Hill, Chris	12
Jirsa, Todd	2
Kimball, Scott	12



Lowe, Jeff	3
Lumpy Ridge	1, 11, 12, 14
Lumpy Trails Day	11, 12, 14
MacDonald, Christine	8
MacDonald, Dougald	8
Mardock, Rob	2
Marrs, John	6
McGregor Ranch	12, 13
McGregor, Muriel	12, 13
Mosier, Sally	11
Mountain Project	3, 4
Okonek, Brian	6
Pieper, Rob	12
Pomerance, Steve	13
Rest Stop Bags	14
Sharp End Award	15
Sievers, Jennifer	8
Snively, Doug	12
Sundance Descent Trail	11
Vanquished Ice Route	4
Verholst, Brian	5
Willard, Kerry	10
Willard, Rod	8, 9, 10, 11